

INTRODUCTORY AND HISTORICAL 25

eighty people, including men, women and children, would be present. They would spend the day feasting and drinking, and on some occasions would continue the party well into the following day. There would generally be some visitors from nearby villages and, in consequence, much exchange of gossip. These fortnightly meetings served the purpose of a newspaper and helped to keep the people in touch. They were almost the only break in a life of otherwise unceasing toil.

There are no shops in Lingtem, no doctor, and no school. The people are mainly self-supporting and grow all their own food. Such things as cotton, oil and salt are obtained from Mangan which, in addition to a few Marwari shopkeepers, has also a post office to which mails are delivered twice a week. This, however, is not much used, since the Lepchas are for the most part still illiterate. This means that in order not to forget a thing they do not find it necessary to commit it to writing. As a result, they have, like most primitive peoples, quite remarkable memories.

For the first few days we were left completely alone; not a soul ventured near us. Early each morning Dhawa and I would set off in our quest for people, but everywhere we went there was nothing but empty houses, each with its guardian dog. I began to get worried, for it certainly looked as though the Maharaja was right, although actually (but I only learned this later) the people were merely away working in their fields. And then one morning Geoffrey discovered an ancient alone in a house. He was toothless, decrepit, and ill, but willing to risk a visit. We decoyed him up to the monastery, gave him some medicine and plied him with cigarettes. As an informant he was useless; but his visit served to break the ice. Others followed, and the village soon realised that we really were harmless. Thereafter we were able to arrange for a regular stream of informants and someone or other usually came each morning to talk. In this manner we soon came to know most of the village by sight, and after the first few weeks were able to